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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [UG](#) [TO](#)
SUBJECT: OHCHR CONCERNED ABOUT FATE OF ITS OFFICE IN
UGANDA, PLEASED AT RENEWAL OF TOGO OFFICE

REF: 07 USUN 834

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission David Gilmour. Reasons:
1.4 (B/D).

ACTION REQUEST - PARA 5.

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has told us it will be forced to close its offices in Uganda within about a month unless the GoU drops its demand for a change in OHCHR activities in the country. The GoU insists that the OHCHR office drop its role of reporting on human rights problems in Uganda and only work on technical assistance, a condition that OHCHR cannot accept. An OHCHR official noted that several Western governments are weighing in with Kampala to change its stance, and asked if the U.S. might do so as well. While Uganda's position marks a continuation of efforts by some African governments to whittle away at the country specific work of Geneva-based human rights institutions, the renewal of OHCHR's office in Togo marks a more encouraging piece of news. END SUMMARY.

CHALLENGE TO OHCHR'S UGANDA OFFICE

¶2. (C) Scott Campbell, the head of OHCHR's Africa Unit, told us July 7 that OHCHR will be forced to close its country office in Uganda within about a month unless the Ugandan government agrees to an extension of the current Memorandum of Understanding concerning the role of the office. Whereas the current MOU, like that for all country offices, stipulates that the OHCHR report on human rights problems in Uganda as well as provide technical assistance on human rights protection, the GoU has insisted that the reporting function be removed from the MOU. OHCHR country offices operate according to a standard MOU whose core elements include a reporting function. Removing that function -- in effect precluding the office from reporting on human rights problems in Uganda -- would be a non-starter, Campbell insisted, and OHCHR would have to close down its office.

¶3. (C) The challenge to the Uganda office's continued existence is part of a broader effort, by many African states, to eliminate or weaken the country-specific human rights activities of OHCHR and the Human Rights Council. As a number of African delegations have underscored in Geneva meetings involving the OHCHR and its former head, High Commissioner Louise Arbour, they view the plethora of country offices in less developed countries -- and their dearth in the developed world -- as part of a pro-Western bias of the OHCHR. According to Campbell, however, Uganda's decision to

insist on a change in the office's mandate also stems from Arbour's decision to present a report on Uganda, as well as on Nepal, to the UNGA Third Committee in October 2007 (reftel). Arbour reportedly failed to coordinate with the GoU ahead of time, further exacerbating ill feelings. The Africa Group in Third Committee, joined by Cuba and others, successfully challenged presentation of that report.

¶4. (C) Closing the Uganda office would be particularly unfortunate, Campbell said, because it has been among OHCHR's more productive operations until now. OHCHR often cites its offices in Nepal and Colombia as models of success; after these two, the office in Uganda is the next most successful undertaking of its kind.

¶5. (C) ACTION REQUEST: According to Campbell, several West European governments are weighing in with Kampala to accept retaining the OHCHR's reporting function in the new MOU. Campbell believed that a similar message from the U.S., perhaps conveyed at high levels in Kampala, might also prove beneficial. With the office slated to close within about a month absent a new MOU, Campbell stressed that Kampala would have to be persuaded quickly to reverse its position.

RENEWAL OF OHCHR'S TOGO OFFICE

¶6. (SBU) In contrast to the discouraging news about Uganda, OHCHR is pleased at the renewal of its MOU for its office in Togo. The Togo country office has fostered good progress on human rights, Campbell believed. He hoped that the Togo office's extension would weigh on Uganda's thinking as well.

As High Commissioner, Campbell added, Arbour had sought to create positive reinforcement for countries like Togo and Uganda by praising their cooperation with country offices, a strategy that he hoped the next High Commissioner would continue.

STORELLA